



## Information Technology Assessment and Plan for the Omaha Region

### Introduction

Broadband high-speed Internet access is transforming Nebraska's economy and society. Businesses are using the technology to become more efficient, reduce costs, expand their markets and increase revenues. New technologies are expanding social opportunities and enhancing quality of life for Nebraskans.

In response to these changing conditions, communities are seeking ways to become "e-communities," defined as communities that are aware of their diverse information technology needs and that strategically plan to use these technologies to meet their economic, community and social development needs in the future. Leadership of e-communities is also planning how to use information technology to recruit and retain youth and grow businesses.

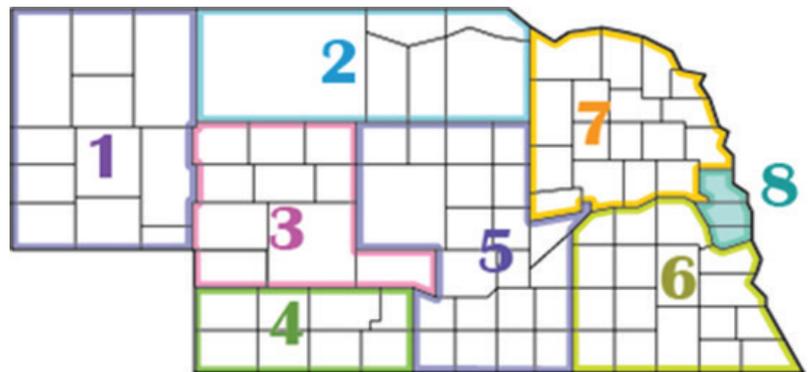


Figure 1. The Omaha region of Nebraska

### Planning Process

This report summarizes the current goals of the Omaha region (see Figure 1), which comprises the following counties: Washington, Douglas and Sarpy. Information for this report was gathered using the following process: A kick-off Regional Forum on April 28, 2011, brought together 40 people from across the region to learn about the Nebraska Broadband Mapping and Planning Initiative. Survey results from an initial household survey were shared, and the statewide map was introduced (see Figure 2). The Nebraska Broadband Mapping Project provides statewide coverage maps, available online at [broadband.nebraska.gov/mapping](http://broadband.nebraska.gov/mapping).

The Omaha region held discussions with key groups in the region to identify and verify resident technology access and usage. Participants then focused on the priorities for the region. Representatives of six key organizations worked with the regional coach to identify audiences, priorities and plans. The data from the map, household survey and subsequent focus groups were the basis for the plan's content. (The participating organizations are listed at the end of this report, Regional Team Representation.)

## Household Survey Results (2010) for Region

The 2010 Household survey found that location matters in broadband adoption. About 76 percent of Nebraska residents have adopted broadband compared to 83 percent of the Omaha metropolitan area. However, limited responses in two defined zip codes in north Omaha indicate only 11 percent of residents in that area are utilizing broadband. Furthermore, only 58 percent of the residents of Washington County are using broadband services. Statewide, most households expressed satisfaction with the reliability, speed and support of their Internet service. However, 38 percent of Omaha residents were satisfied with the price of their Internet service, compared to 55 percent of Southwest region residents.

Over four in ten (43%) of Omaha residents are satisfied with the types of Internet services available in their community. Statewide, 46 percent of households say there are free public “hotspots” available in their community; 63 percent of Omaha residents say they have free public “hotspots” in their community. About 75 percent of Nebraska households have access to a place locally that provides free Internet access (library, school, etc.). That number is 76 percent in the Omaha metropolitan area. Of the Omaha area residents who say they have access to such a public facility, 40 percent use the computers there.

## Mapping Wireline and Wireless Coverage in Nebraska

The map (Figure 2) provides a visual representation of wireline and wireless coverage for the state of Nebraska. As illustrated on the map, the green shading represents the fixed wireless coverage; blue represents mobile wireless coverage; red represents DSL wireline coverage; lavender represents fiber wireline service; and orange represents cable wireline coverage. More details on mapped service coverage are included in the guide at the left of the state map. Areas that are not shaded represent the unserved areas of the state.

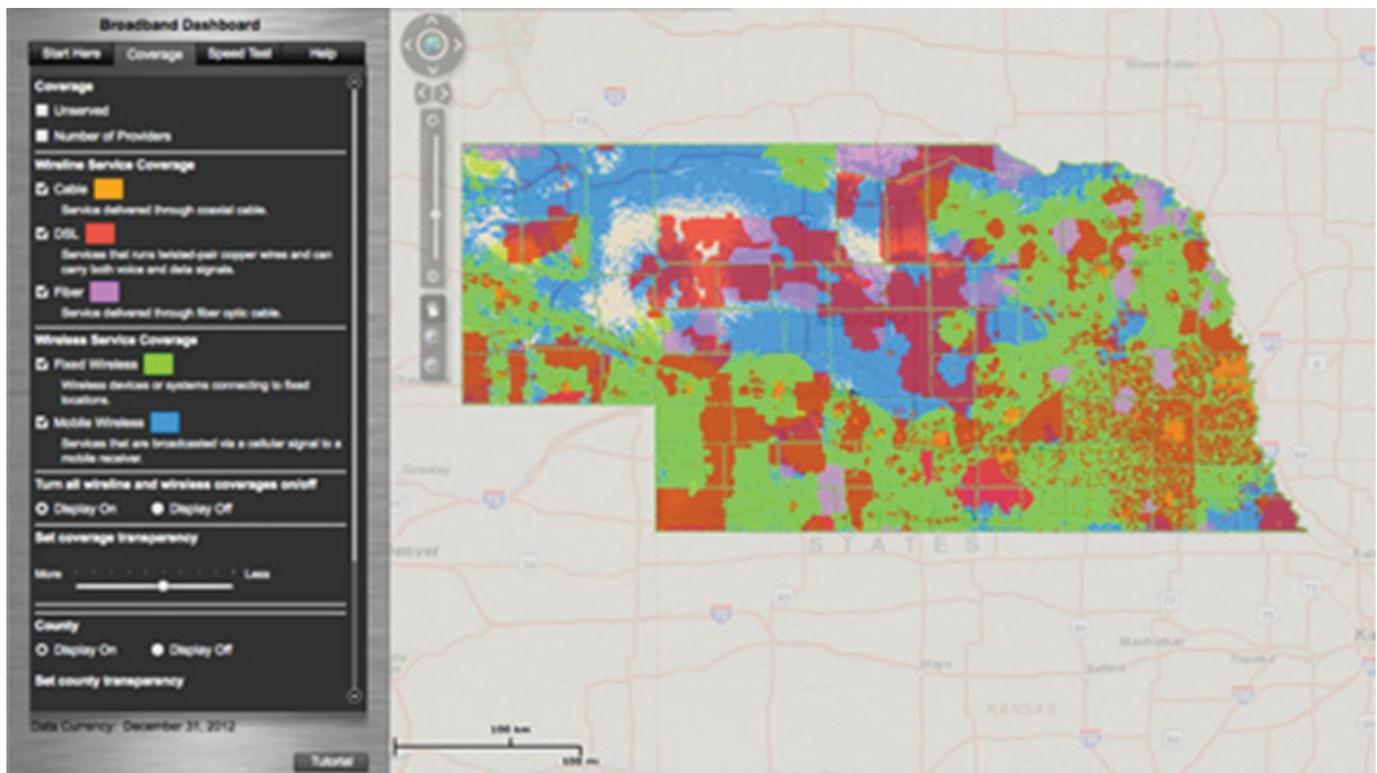
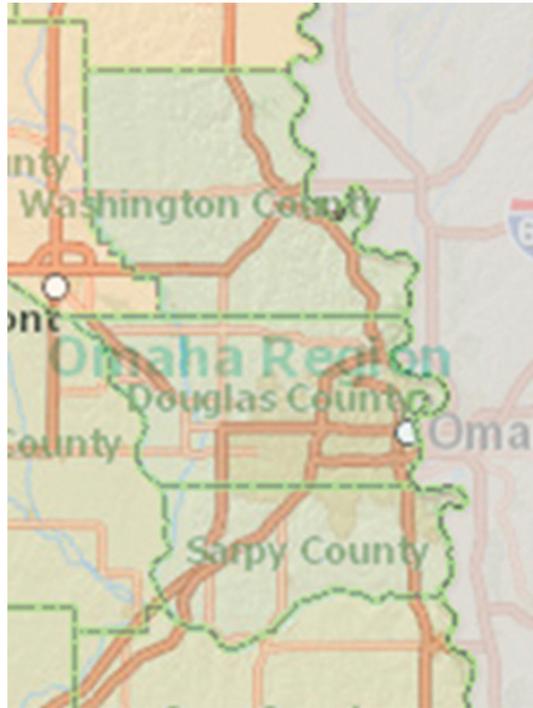


Figure 2. Broadband wireline and wireless coverage in Nebraska

The map in Figure 3 provides a better view of areas in the Omaha region that are currently unserved. The dark purple shading generally indicates geographic areas that do not currently have broadband service coverage available. The map reflects broadband service access across the region.



**Figure 3. Unserved areas in Omaha region (no broadband services available in purple shaded area.)**

## **Omaha Region Broadband Vision Statement and Goals**

*The implementation and utilization of technology in the Omaha Metro area through new technology education opportunities and through existing community partners, organizations and agencies will improve the health and economic well-being of low resource families. Seeing the benefits of broadband will make people aware of and increase use of those benefits of broadband in Nebraska.*

The Omaha Metro is different in access to broadband services and in demographic structures than most other regions of the state. Therefore, efforts of the Initiative will focus on target areas. The broadband team will partner to increase the effectiveness of broadband usage. As part of the grant project, AIM (a not-for-profit organization headquartered in Omaha), will analyze the reasons for this disparity and make recommendations for strategies to drive adoption growth in the target communities. The target audience will be low resource families.

The team, including AIM representatives, will meet with stakeholders in the region and do an analysis. Their efforts will focus on and target North and South Omaha families, who have demographic profiles that indicate low broadband usage and low financial resources.

Key partners in these meeting will be the Urban League and the Latino Center for the Midlands and other identified agencies who have effective relationships with the target groups.

### **Priority Areas**

According to the 2010 household survey, 87% of those living in Omaha indicated that they are utilizing broadband. In contrast, only 11% of the respondents in two zip codes in North Omaha are utilizing broadband. To address this difference in utilization, the focus of the Omaha region is on this underserved population. By increasing broadband

implementation and utilization, the health and economic well-being of low resource families may be improved. These high priority areas are identified.

In order to gain an understanding of the factors contributing to the relatively low level of broadband adoption in North and South Omaha, interviews were conducted with community leaders and service providers. In addition, an inventory was conducted of computer-related training opportunities serving citizens and businesses in these areas of the community.

**Priority 1:** Digital Literacy and Adoption — *Establish partnerships with key stakeholder groups to accomplish goals outlined in the regional plan and develop a series of workshops with the partners to provide effective education for their clientele.*

**Priority 2:** Health Care — *Develop tools as needed to provide access to needed services (such as health care enrollment).*

**Priority 3:** Economic Development — *Utilize AIM's Career Link for low-resource families to find employment opportunities.*

**Priority 4:** Non Profits and Education — *Work with community partners to provide effective education and build awareness of how non-profits can increase their influence and effectively deliver services using technology.*

## **Digital Literacy and Adoption**

The region has identified digital literacy and adoption as the first priority focus.

### **Assessment**

Access to and utilization of broadband services are very important, particularly as they relate to social services. The application process for social service and unemployment benefits, necessary for a substantial portion of the target population, has largely moved online. Therefore, access to and the ability to use broadband services are essential.

A majority of households in the target area do not have Internet access. Cable television service is widespread but does not extend to broadband in most instances. Cost is a consideration; however, Internet service providers in the area have offered reduced-rate access for qualifying low-income households to mitigate this concern.

### **Action Plan**

Provide and explore lower cost connections to services.

The broadband team plans to work with two major broadband providers in defined areas to identify any offers or reduced subscription rate options. On occasion, providers offer reduced computer and monthly rate for homes that qualify for reduced school lunch. The group plans to create awareness among target groups of any offers/options. All participants acknowledge that cost is a real barrier to access, adoption and usage.

Assess need to effectively use mobile devices for low-resource families.

A majority of households in the target area do not have Internet access. Cable television service is widespread but does not extend to broadband in most instances. Cost is a consideration; however, Internet service providers in the area have offered reduced-rate access for qualifying low-income households to mitigate this concern;

Basic and remedial computer education is needed, particularly for those age 25 and older. Numerous opportunities exist, although transportation to public computer centers is an obstacle for some.

## Health Care

The region has identified access to health care information and systems through online technology as a priority focus.

### Assessment

Excellent health care provider resources are available in region. The target audience lacks the skills to access these health care systems.

The team has identified the need for the target audience to access personal health information and benefit enrollment online. However, the team acknowledges that the tools and skills for these important processes are not currently available for the target audience. Awareness of need and value of services to individuals and households is lacking in many cases, too.

### Action Plan

Develop tools as needed to provide access to needed services (such as health care enrollment).

There are a number of locations and programs that provide access to broadband and training in the types of skills identified as necessary to drive broadband growth.

- Omaha Public Library offers training opportunities at sites across the targeted communities.
  - Computer labs are available at multiple locations.
  - Adult programs are offered, including Microsoft Word® training (basic and intermediate), Microsoft PowerPoint® basics, Internet basics, and computer basics.
- Midlands Latino Community Development Corporation provides assistance with computer labs and training for their memberships and targeted audiences.
- Latino Center of the Midlands offers opportunities with computer labs availability and computer training.

## Economic Development

The region has identified economic development, especially a focus on promoting employment through AIM Career Link, as a priority focus.

### Assessment

#### Economic Development and E-Commerce

A strong economy exists in the Omaha metro area. However, many low-resource families lack the skills to access career opportunities. These online opportunities are illustrated through as AIM's Career Link.

Basic computer skills are a requirement for nearly any type of employment, yet there is a large portion of the target population that does not possess these skills. In addition, the ability to use the Internet to search for employment opportunities is viewed as essential.

### Action Plan

#### Utilize AIM's Career Link for low-resource families to find employment opportunities.

Key focus of economic development is on expanding employment numbers for target audiences. This plan differs from other regions because of focus on individuals and not businesses.

- Omaha Public Library offers training opportunities at sites across the targeted communities.
  - Computer labs are available at multiple locations
  - Training programs are offered that support adult computer usage and job searches, including Internet basics, computer basics, online job search, and the Online Foundation Directory.

## Non Profits and Education

The region has identified actions with nonprofit partners and education as a priority focus.

For these efforts, education will include creating general knowledge of available broadband services and advantages they offer individuals.

### Assessment

The biggest needs identified by community leaders are 1) educating and building awareness among the target population about the need for broadband access and skills development; and 2) directing the target population to available training opportunities. These organizations are strong financially and by participation in the Omaha metro area and have a strong connection with UNL Extension. These relationships offer potential partners to offer programming from the grant.

Strong resources and options are available in the community. Goal is on the target audience that exhibits a need to increase usage.

### Action Plan

**Identify potential key groups/agencies/organizations for shared efforts.**

**Plan a series of workshops with the partners to provide effective education for their clientele (low-resource families).**

**Expand partner relationships as needed to meet identified needs.**

- A wide variety of community organizations are available to help connect with their audiences and members to expand awareness of computer value, access and usage. The organizations include Urban League of Nebraska, Faith Community, Salem Baptist Church, Morningstar Church, Pilgrim Church, South Omaha Faith Community, Omaha Public Library, Latino Center of the Midlands, Midlands Latino Community Development Corporation, and Omaha Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

In addition, it is important to share the stories of individual success. To achieve this effort, the broadband team will:

- Develop a series of personal stories from individuals in the target population that can be disseminated to build awareness of the relevance of access to and utilization of broadband services.
- Assist community organizations with outreach to recruit more participation in available technology training programs.
- Utilize existing outreach channels in the target communities to disseminate personal stories and training opportunities.

## Conclusion

This document reflects the current status and identifies future broadband technology needs of the Nebraska Broadband Initiative Omaha Region. The content has been developed with the input and assistance of residents of the Omaha region. Changes to this plan will occur due to the dynamic nature of the technologies and the implementation of the action plans. Your input and feedback may stimulate and contribute to updates in the regional plan. Share feedback on this plan with Vernon Waldren, Omaha Regional Coach, by phone at 402-444-7804, or by email at [vwaldren1@unl.edu](mailto:vwaldren1@unl.edu).

This process is fluid and dynamic, and this report is intended to capture its status only at this point in time. This evolution will continue.

## **Omaha Region Team Representation**

### **Partners**

AIM

Urban League of Nebraska

Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce

Midlands Latino Community Development Corporation

Latino Center of the Midlands

Nonprofit Association of the Midlands

For additional information, contact:  
Vernon Waldren, Omaha Regional Coach  
University of Nebraska–Lincoln  
402-444-7804  
*[vwaldren1@unl.edu](mailto:vwaldren1@unl.edu)*

## References

Internet Connectivity and Use in Nebraska Survey.

[http://liferaydemo.unl.edu/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=32e75940-6288-401e-93a4-9a3ebd8a2398&groupId=4583971&and.pdf](http://liferaydemo.unl.edu/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=32e75940-6288-401e-93a4-9a3ebd8a2398&groupId=4583971&and.pdf)

Engaging People. Linking the World Broadband Planning Workbook

[http://broadband.nebraska.gov/c/document\\_library/get\\_file?uuid=d7b74d0f-c89b-4c74-907d-ec3331eabb03&groupId=1874&and.pdf](http://broadband.nebraska.gov/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=d7b74d0f-c89b-4c74-907d-ec3331eabb03&groupId=1874&and.pdf)



### **The Nebraska Broadband Initiative**

This Broadband Mapping and Planning Initiative is funded through a grant to the Nebraska Public Service Commission by the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Telecommunications and Information Administration and aims to increase broadband adoption and utilization.

Project partners include the University of Nebraska, Nebraska Department of Economic Development, Nebraska Information Technology Commission, Nebraska Public Service Commission, and the AIM Institute.